

If A Rifle Could

I was made in 1917. An old man with an eye patch put me together with Kentucky oak and Minnesota steel. He put me in a crate stamped RIFLE, M1903 SPRINGFIELD, CAL 30-06, and I was shipped to France. I was issued to my Tommy, and he called me Madeleine after a local girl he'd met. We went to Belleau Wood and beat back Jerry at 700 yards. Tommy called me the most straight-shooting rifle in Corps; if a rifle could blush, I would have. My Tommy took good care of me, and I of him, but a German grenade sent us both home in pine-wood boxes. If a rifle could weep, I would have.

I sat in storage for about two decades, mostly forgotten, but then came the drums of war again. If a rifle could opt out, I would have. My old broken stock was replaced, I was given a scope, and I was reissued to a marksman by the name of James. James named me Mary after his sweetheart back home, and we both fought our hardest to get him back to her. I thought often of Tommy, and if a rifle could tell tales, I would have. We saw Tarawa and the Marshall Islands. We took the Marianas; James was never the same after Saipan. If a rifle could comfort instead of kill, I would have. The Fourth Marines went on. Guam. Tinian. Peleliu. Iwo Jima. We fought long and hard for Mount Suribachi. When the flag went up, if a rifle could laugh, I would have. The going was slow on Okinawa, but go we did. We took that island, and shortly thereafter James took me home. If a rifle could sigh with relief, I would have. Mary didn't approve of me much, so I didn't go on the wall like James wanted. But I was happy to stand duty in the closet, just in case. If a rifle could say thank you, I would have.